

GENDER EQUITY

480. Ms E.L. HAMILTON to the Minister for Women's Interests:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's commitment to delivering gender equality and supporting women in our community.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on how this government is driving greater female participation within the public sector and supporting women in leadership positions?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house whether she is aware of anyone in this place who is failing to drive the cultural changes required to achieve equality for women in WA?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

That is an excellent question. I thank the member for the question.

- (1)–(2) I hope it goes without saying that the McGowan government is committed to pursuing gender equality. This will not be achieved by one policy change, one initiative or one set of speeches; it will actually take time and effort. That is what we are committed to. Members may be aware that the state government has launched a 10-year strategy, in which we have outlined a number of initiatives. It is called *Stronger together: WA's plan for gender equality*. It is the first of its kind for WA. We have a series of action plans underneath that. For instance, we are the first in Australia, after some pursuing on my part, to report to the federal Workplace Gender Equality Agency. WA has a public sector agency that is reporting to that agency to see if that could work. I have advocated for that. It is now a commitment of national cabinet that public sector agencies report to WGEA and use its significant resources and capacity.

We set a target before coming to the election in 2017 of 50 per cent of women on government boards and committees. Of course, we have done well in getting to 52 per cent—an incredible achievement that has taken determined action and effort, but we have got there. We are working towards 50 per cent women in the senior executive service. Finally, we announced recently the piloting of a gender procurement effort with selected public sector agencies. They include a large number of very significant agencies in the public sector. We will work on that for the next 12 months.

Setting targets and holding ourselves to account is something that this government has committed to doing. It is working. We recently released the *2022 Women's report card*, which I mentioned yesterday in Parliament. As a result of considered effort, we have now gone from 34 per cent of women in the senior executive service in government to 43.8 per cent. That is an increase of 33 per cent. That is remarkable. It has taken effort, commitment and drive. We have achieved that. It is really significant. I mentioned the government boards and committees, now at 52.5 per cent.

Obviously, in Parliament, it does not take a genius to see that Labor is doing the heavy lifting when it comes to increasing not only the number of women in our Parliament, but also the amount of diversity in our Parliament. Do we see any effort by the opposition? I said yesterday and the day before in Parliament that members opposite do not do the hard work and they do not put in any effort; all they do is read *The West Australian* and come in here and take shots from the cheap seats. In fact, it has been 1 100 days since I was asked a question on women's interests by the opposition—not since 2019. That is absolutely remarkable. In this term of government, I have not been asked a question on women's interests. That is how much the opposition cares about the portfolio of women's interests. It is absolutely astounding. Of course, we saw the opposition's real attitude and its real beliefs in full light yesterday in private members' business. When I was on my feet, the Leader of the Liberal Party continued to interject and speak over me in a way that he has not shown determination to do with some of the male members. He continued to tell me what I was about to say and continued to interrupt and speak over me. It was really remarkable. The Leader of the Liberal Party has form. It is well known that he has never once called out the members of "The Clan", to which he is indebted, about their appalling attitudes, which are not historic; they are well known and on the record. I think members of the public showed their disdain at the last state election, which carried over to the federal election as well—their understanding that the Liberal Party is not committed to addressing gender inequality in our community.

I want to also draw the house's attention to some form that the Leader of the Liberal Party has, going back to the mid-1990s when he was president of the Liberal Party. It was during that time that the now member for Cottesloe and Leader of the Liberal Party was a close associate and supporter of the then Senator Noel Crichton-Browne. In fact, *The West Australian* has variously described Noel Crichton-Browne as the now member for Cottesloe's mentor and someone he owes his job to.

In 1995, it emerged that Mr Crichton-Browne's then wife had taken out a restraining order against him in response to an incident of domestic violence. It prompted then federal leader John Howard to stand

the senator down as Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate. *The West Australian* reports on 5 April 1995 —

Mr Howard said he found domestic violence repulsive ...

The then federal leader, former Prime Minister John Howard, took action when a senior member of his party, the deputy leader in the Senate, had a restraining order against him. He took action. But what did the Leader of the Liberal Party, then Liberal Party president, do? According to *The West Australian*, Hon David Honey said he was an “unwavering supporter”. He did not condemn domestic violence; he dismissed it. The day after it was reported that Noel Crichton-Browne had a restraining order against him, on 6 April 1995, the member for Cottesloe sought to downplay the matter, saying “other matters will rapidly supersede them”. *The West Australian* reports —

As for whether Senator Crichton-Browne should step down, Dr Honey said: “How long does an individual pay a price for an act?”

I will finish on this point. More than downplaying domestic violence and calling out bad behaviour, as the then federal leader of the Liberal Party did, he sought to pursue those who brought this incident to light. He told *The West Australian* —

“It’s my responsibility to pursue those individuals responsible and bring them to account and I am doing just that ...

Senator Sue Knowles said at the time that she was being gagged. I quote from *The West Australian* on 24 June 1995 —

LIBERAL Senator Sue Knowles said yesterday she had been muzzled and could not give her view of the Noel Crichton-Browne affair.

...

Yesterday, Senator Knowles said: “If the State president, David Honey, allowed me the same latitude to speak to the media that he does his friend, Senator Crichton-Browne, without a constant threat of censure, I would be able to make my position public.

Point of Order

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Point of order.

The SPEAKER: Please resume your seat, minister. Once a point of order is called, the person on their feet is required to sit down immediately and not continue talking. I do not actually require the point of order. It has been a very lengthy answer. The question itself has been well and truly answered. We have diverted somewhat onto answers to questions that were not actually asked, so I am quite keen to move on to the next question. Member for Vasse.